


# Need-to-Knows for Start-Ups

U.S. entrepreneurs with a few years of successful growth answer the question, “**What do you wish you knew when you began your business?**”

A group of young African entrepreneurs 

Credit: AP Images

## No One is Good at Everything

“There will always be tasks that you don’t have the skills to complete, and it’s okay to outsource those. It’s better to spend some money on an accountant than to try to learn payroll.” – Liam Martin, [Staff.com](#), an online staffing agency connecting employers and employees.

## Organization Is Key

“As we become a larger company, we are realizing how chaotic it is to manage all the paperwork. I never like to delete stuff in case we need it in the future. Nevertheless, it became severely overwhelming and made us inefficient, so we decided to invest in ... a high-speed scanner, and interns to help us organize and digitize everything. It was worth the time and money.” – Derek Capo, [Next Step China](#), a Miami-based firm that offers affordable and flexible programs in China for students, professionals and government officials.

## People Talk a Big Game

“You learn to filter through the “talkers” and the “doers” so you end up working with people who are exceptionally good at what they do.” – Danny Wong, [Blank Label](#), a Boston-based online men’s apparel company.

## Write Down Reliable Processes

“You start up with so much energy, so many ideas and endless possibilities. You quickly maneuver and start to grow.... However, nobody told me how incredibly important it is to implement reliable and repeatable processes. You should write everything down and take note when something goes well.” – Arjun Arora, [ReTargeter](#), a display advertising platform specializing in audience targeting and retargeting.

## The Vision Will Change

“My co-founder and I started with a very strong, clear vision of what we wanted our business to become. That vision shifted over time as new opportunities arose.... Initially, I resisted changing course because I felt like we were giving up on our vision. But eventually, I realized we were creating a better, much bigger business than we originally imagined.” – Martina Welke, [Zealyst](#), a Seattle-based networking service that hosts customized events and facilitates connections

## Lead From Love

“Once I discovered how to lead from a place of love and gratitude, the landscape of (my company) changed. We started attracting a higher caliber of clientele, our quality improved, our processes improved and overall our company was infused with more joy.” — [Corey Blake, Round Table Companies](#), a business consultancy in Evanston, Illinois.

## Work Smart, Not Hard

“In the beginning, I thought I was being effective by simply working 80 hours a week. That couldn’t be further from the truth. The adept startup owner should instead focus on ways to get things done effectively in a shorter period of time.” — [Andrew Schrage, Money Crashers Personal Finance](#), a Chicago-based online site that teaches individuals about credit and debt, investing, education, real estate, insurance, spending, and more.

## Clients Don’t Always Pay on Time

“If you work with clients, it’s not a question of if they will pay late, but a question of when. Create a cash buffer as soon as humanly possible so you’re not left scrambling when a check comes late [payment is behind schedule] or gets lost in the mail [disappears in the post].” — [Allie Siarto, Fare Oak](#), a Michigan-based online women’s fashion store.


## People Are Complex Creatures

“The bulk of your time with an early startup is focused on building your team and supporting them to be great. That means you are part recruiter, part coach, part psychiatrist and part referee. But if you love helping people be great, it’s an awesome experience.” — [Eric Koester](#), Data Collateral, Inc., a Washington-based business consultancy.

*Adapted from an article published online by The Young Entrepreneur Council (YEC), an invite-only organization comprised of promising young entrepreneurs. In partnership with Citi, [YEC](#) recently launched StartupCollective, a free virtual mentorship program that helps millions of entrepreneurs start and grow businesses.*

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# Lessons for Aspiring Young Entrepreneurs


Photo Courtesy   
Sheena Lindahl

By: Sheena Lindahl, co-founder and CEO of [Empact](#)

Join Sheena Lindahl for a Facebook #YALICHAT starting Tuesday, November 18. You can submit

*your questions until Thursday, November 20. Post your questions on Facebook or tweet your questions to @YALINetwork and include #YALICHAT. Tuesday-Thursday, November 18-20.*

Most entrepreneurs have few resources when they begin. They do not have a lot of money, experience, education or networks but they launch and grow their businesses anyway. I saw this firsthand in September when I met young entrepreneurs in Ghana. The challenges and experiences they described to me were not all the same as those faced by other entrepreneurs. I have learned that it no matter where you live, it is how people react to their challenges that makes all the difference in their success.

Sheena Lindahl with group of young  entrepreneurs during her visit to the U.S. Embassy in Ghana. Photo courtesy Sheena Lindahl.

These are some tips I shared with aspiring Ghanaians:

**Break a big idea into a smaller idea to start.** Most people launching their first company do not have the funding or skills to start the next WhatsApp. I met an inspiring young entrepreneur in Tamale, Ghana, who was running a clothing store. He started with a single pair of sneakers — no store, no inventory, no funding — just one lone pair of sneakers. He sold those and used his profit to buy two more pairs. Then he branched out and included other products. He kept reinvesting his profits until he had enough to fund inventory, space and people to work for him. Starting small is often far less risky and a more certain path to success than waiting for an investor.

**Tomorrow will not be a better day to start.** Many entrepreneurs wait for what they think are perfect conditions to start their businesses. Very rarely will the perfect time arrive. Instead, entrepreneurs get their businesses off the ground by taking action today to move forward. By taking even small actions they take control and make their own favorable conditions.

**Identify your assets and start from there.** Focus on what you do have and not what you don't. We worry about our assets, our ideas or what the critics might say. You cannot control someone else's actions or thoughts. You cannot control what challenges you're starting with.

**Focus your efforts on what you can control.** Entrepreneurs focus on what they can control. If you don't have money to launch, maybe you have a network of friends and family who will be your first customers. You may have an uncle who understands the process of exporting or a financially savvy aunt who can help you think through your plan. Your own skill set — whether it includes photography or carpentry — will also benefit your business. Networks and skills are assets as valuable as investment dollars. By focusing on what you do have and where you have control, you have all you need to take your first steps.


*Sheena is president and co-founder of Empact, an organization that has held events bringing top young entrepreneurs to college campuses, including the [Empact Showcase](#), a celebration of young entrepreneurs with recognition events held at the White House, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and*

*the United Nations.*

*The views and opinions expressed here belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the YALI Network or the U.S. government.*

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## Entrepreneurship Is Open to All

Jonathan Ortmans speaks at the Global  Entrepreneurship Conference in March 2014.

Credit: UnleashingIdeas.org

Global Entrepreneurship Week, November 17-24, is a collection of interconnected startup communities across the world, devoted to the notion that all boats rise on an incoming tide. That's according to Jonathan Ortmans, the president of this annual enterprise, which unfolds this year in 140 countries.

0. Ortmans, who started his own company at the age of 19, offers these guidelines for the up-and-coming businessperson.

### **What are five reasons that 2014 is the best time to start a business?**

0. 1. Startup communities are stronger than ever. They provide entrepreneurs with resources, inspiration, peer support, networking events and more.
2. Entrepreneurs can access many online free education tools, such as the [Kauffman Founders School](#), the [Khan Academy](#) entrepreneurship series and [EdX](#).
3. Entrepreneurs can implement business ideas with less initial capital today, using new technology and platforms.
4. Business creation is no longer a matter of pedigree, family or elite education. Entrepreneurship is open to all.
5. Customers are more open to new solutions. Many early adopters are willing to provide entrepreneurs with the feedback to fine-tune products or services.

## What are four qualities required to be a successful entrepreneur?

1. Entrepreneurs are sustained by their passion in the pursuit of success, even when the odds are against them.
2. Successful entrepreneurs know how to effectively collaborate and communicate with others, which are crucial skills for marketing ideas, building teams, seeking financial backing and other critical startup activities.
3. Successful entrepreneurs understand the value of a support system in their community and aren't afraid to utilize it.
4. Successful entrepreneurs have previous experience in the sector they are entering.

## What are three pieces of advice for new entrepreneurs?

1. Wait to seek outside capital. You'll build a nimble business by standing it up on your own and finding advice from mentors rather than investors. Evaluate why and when to raise money, as well as the consequences of accepting outside funding.
2. Build the right team. Each member of a startup team should bring new, complementary skills to the table while sharing the passion for the idea.
3. Test the vision continuously. Validate your idea, keeping your startup lean, improving your concept, measuring success, learning and ... doing it all again.

Learn more about [Global Entrepreneurship Week](#) and the [Global Entrepreneurship Summit](#). 

*This article is condensed from the original version appearing in [The Eurooptimist.eu](#).*

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## Nigerian Entrepreneur Makes Shoes, One Pair at a Time

*"Follow your dreams with courage, imagination and the ability to attract and work with the best minds."*

Credit: Niyi Omodara




Niyi Omodara, a young entrepreneur and member of the YALI Network, is the founder, designer and principal craftsman of Extra Valuable Apparel (EVA), a footwear company in Akure, Nigeria. He is a self-taught craftsman who started making slippers for his family in the early 1990s. Omodara is now

producing “bespoke” shoes, customized for a client and made to order. His vision for EVA is to “manufacture world-class leather products through superior designs and quality materials.”

## Could you describe your business to the YALI Network?

**Omodara:** EVA shoes are distinct because they are comfy, trendy and neater than all other Nigerian handmade shoes. I both design and create shoes for individual customers. Our products are sold largely by word-of-mouth, one customer to the next, through social media and wherever I can find customers. Each month we produce in the range of 35-50 pairs of customized shoes. That comes to about 450-480 pairs per year.

EVA produces more than 450 pairs of  custom-made shoes per year in Akure, Nigeria.

Credit: Niyi Omodara

## How many people do you employ?

**Omodara:** Presently, I have two staff members and two trainees. One person assists me in shoe production alongside the trainees, while the second staff person works mainly on the branding, marketing and delivery of orders to our customers.

We are working hard to get more motivated [employees] in the production section. Finding skilled and dedicated workers is hard, but we are optimistic.

## What are your goals for this business?

**Omodara:** I’m constantly updating my business plan, but these are my overall goals:

1. To become Nigeria’s hallmark for locally made products, especially in the leather manufacturing industry. I hope EVA can achieve this with an individualistic approach to customer satisfaction and service and by using the highest-quality materials.
2. To be a global player in shoe manufacturing from Africa by the year 2035. To achieve that, it becomes more obvious by the day that we will have to partner with international shoe-manufacturing factories to scale up production significantly. At that level, my role will largely be design, quality assurance, general supervision and marketing.
3. To continuously attract, train and retain the best minds and hands in order to fulfill the earlier mentioned goals.

One of the shoe designs available from  EVA

Credit: Niyi Omodara

## What advice do you give to others hoping to start a small business?

**Omodara:** Follow your dreams with courage, imagination and the ability to attract and work with

the best minds. Focus intently on your goals. Loyalty, commitment and passion for the job are critical virtues, technical skills apart.

## Are there any special obstacles for entrepreneurs and small-business persons in Nigeria?

**Omodara:** Yes, there are plenty of them:

- 1) The lack of a consistent, reliable energy supply is a big one in Nigeria. I generate my own power to run the factory half of the time. That required an initial investment of almost \$1,000, and about \$100 per month to maintain gasoline and service.
- 2) Access to investment capital is difficult when interest rates on bank loans run up to double figures. I started in 2011 with about \$105 in capital that I drew from savings.
- 3) Numbers of skilled workers are insufficient due to a general preference among young people for white-collar jobs rather than positions requiring skilled labour. The lack of skilled workers becomes a barrier to increased production for EVA.

## Please briefly describe EVA's supply chain. Are raw materials locally sourced or imported?

**Omodara:** We buy all our raw materials in Nigeria. On the sales end, customers buy directly from us. We have contacted some of the biggest online stores in Nigeria to discuss making EVA products available, but no reply yet.

*Are you a young entrepreneur? Share your experiences with the YALI Network on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).*

*During the month of November, the YALI Network will focus on the topic of entrepreneurship, in recognition of the [Global Entrepreneurship Summit](#) to be held in Morocco November 19-21.*

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## Is Entrepreneurship for You?

Starting your own business can be an exciting and rewarding experience. It can offer numerous advantages, such as being your own boss, setting your own schedule and making a living doing something you enjoy. But becoming a successful entrepreneur requires thorough planning, creativity and hard work.

Credit: Shutterstock



Consider whether you have the following characteristics and skills commonly associated with successful entrepreneurs:

**1. Comfortable with taking risks:** Being your own boss also means you're the one making tough decisions. Entrepreneurship involves uncertainty. Do you avoid uncertainty in life at all costs? If yes, then entrepreneurship may not be the best fit for you. If you enjoy the thrill of taking calculated risks, read on.

**2. Independent:** Entrepreneurs must make a lot of decisions on their own. If you find you can trust your instincts — and you're not afraid of rejection every now and then — you could be on your way to being an entrepreneur.

**3. Persuasive:** You may have the greatest idea in the world, but if you cannot persuade customers, employees, and potential lenders or partners, you may find entrepreneurship to be challenging. If you enjoy public speaking, engage new people with ease and find you make compelling arguments grounded in facts, it's likely you're poised to make your idea succeed.

**4. Able to negotiate:** As a small-business owner, you will need to negotiate everything from leases to contract terms to prices. Polished negotiation skills will help you save money and keep your business running smoothly.

**5. Creative:** Are you able to think of new ideas? Can you imagine new ways to solve problems? Entrepreneurs must be able to think creatively. If you have insights on how to take advantage of new opportunities, entrepreneurship may be a good fit.

**6. Support from others:** Before you start a business, it's important to have a strong support system in place. You'll be forced to make many important decisions, especially in the first months of opening your business. If you do not have a support network of people to help you, consider finding a business mentor — someone who is experienced, successful, and willing to provide advice and guidance.

Adapted from an article published on the [U.S. Small Business Administration](#) website.

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## [The Civil Society Forum at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit](#)

### **What is the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit?**

It's the largest engagement a U.S. president has ever had with African leaders and governments. The U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit will bring together 50 heads of state, along with a range of U.S. and African civil society and business leaders, to discuss the future of Africa.

### **What issues will the Summit address?**



The summit leader sessions will focus on topics such as trade and investment, peace and regional stability, and good governance. The signature events will address issues such as civil society, women's empowerment, global health, resilience and food security, and wildlife trafficking.

### **What will happen at the civil society event?**

U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power will join other U.S. and African officials, civil society leaders and members of the U.S. Congress to discuss ways governments can further involve citizens and civil society in meeting shared challenges.

Through panel discussions, a town hall meeting and a keynote address, the *Civil Society Forum* will touch on the issues of corporate accountability and transparency; the importance of civic space to social entrepreneurship, civic innovation and development; strengthening the judiciary; and existing U.S.-Africa initiatives.

The event's key outcomes may include commitments from government and civil society to emulate successful regional or international partnership models and technical assistance from the United States to support and expand successful engagement between government and civil society.


### **Why is this issue important to young African leaders?**

Civil society gives citizens a voice. It complements the efforts of governments and the private sector to help people. It advances democracy, respect for human rights, inclusive development and media independence. It helps communities become prosperous and stable and pushes political institutions to be agile and responsive to the people they serve.

The United States has made support for and protection of civil society a cornerstone of its foreign policy. It encourages African leaders to join in helping to make civil society strong. Young African leaders can be a critical part of that effort.

### **Photo credit: Projekthope**

### **"What was the outcome of the signature Civil Society Forum event at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit?"**

Secretary of State John Kerry spoke  about the role of civil society at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit on August 4.  
Credit: AP Images

Secretary of State John Kerry opened the forum on civil society, which focused on leveraging the knowledge and experience of citizens to solve their countries' main development challenges.

U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Samantha Power urged leaders of African countries that are not yet part of the [Open Government Partnership](#) (OGP) to join the international network. She said governments can use the OGP as a resource for decisionmaking and for sharing information with citizens. She encouraged governments that have joined the OGP to make their open-government action plans publicly accessible.

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# **What is Social Entrepreneurship?**

Employing tactics from government, civil society and the private sector, social entrepreneurship seeks to address social issues through collaborative creation and widespread adoption of new solutions.

Social entrepreneurs see social issues as opportunities to create positive change. They aim to achieve this change by developing innovative yet pragmatic solutions — new products, services or processes — that fundamentally alter and improve the status quo. Such solutions are capable not only of reaching more people but also of sustaining themselves financially. That is, while social entrepreneurs seek to create social value, they also generate financial value to reinvest in their venture, thereby expanding it to help more people.

Just as entrepreneurship is vital to the economy, social entrepreneurship is vital to society. By tackling social issues and achieving scalable, sustainable impact, social entrepreneurship can create a more equitable society. By providing innovative solutions to society's unmet needs, social entrepreneurs can help spur sustainable human and economic development.

**Photo Credit: [Echoing Green NYC/Flickr](#)**

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# **How Is Social Entrepreneurship Different?**

Social entrepreneurship differs from traditional entrepreneurship in many ways. One key way to distinguish a traditional entrepreneur from a social entrepreneur is through the goal he hopes to achieve. While the traditional entrepreneur aims to create a product, service or process for which a consumer will pay, the social entrepreneur aims to create a product, service or process from which society will benefit. In essence, traditional entrepreneurs aim to create commercial value where social entrepreneurs aim to create social value.

Furthermore, because social entrepreneurs are tackling issues such as the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, the outcomes of their success can be more rewarding. While a success in the business world can mean more money for investors, success in social entrepreneurship can mean saving lives — and fundamentally improving the world.

The work of social entrepreneurs also differs from that of civil society organizations. While philanthropists, social activists and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also work toward the creation of social value, they achieve that social value in different ways.

Philanthropists and social activists use influence — whether from financial contributions, political clout or public pressure — to create social value. NGOs deploy products, services or processes within the status quo to create social value. But social entrepreneurs go above and beyond: They create social value by generating innovative solutions that establish a completely new — and improved — status quo. And rather than funding through donations, social entrepreneurs reinvest their revenue into their ventures.

**Photo Credit: Echoing Green NYC/[Flickr](#)**

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## **Could You Be a Social Entrepreneur?**

- Are you perceptive? Can you see an opportunity for change when others see a stubborn social issue?
- Are you determined? Can you devote your life to pursuing this opportunity for change?
- Are you innovative? Can you develop new yet practical solutions to solve this social issue?
- Are you courageous? Can you withstand the wear and the risk of repeated failure?
- Are you results-oriented? Can you establish measurable outcomes, using data to refine your approach and enhance your impact?

**Photo Credit: Deutsche Welle/[Flickr](#)**

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## **Generation Good**

A generation plans to change the world. Millennials — or 18- to 29-year-old Americans — are anxious to get jobs, but given a choice, they favor jobs they figure might make the world a better place. They grew up in the digital age, making them well aware of the world's problems.

Today's university students, especially, have a do-gooder mission, and fulfilling that mission is more important to them than having children or a prestigious career, acquiring wealth or becoming community leaders, according to Cliff Zukin, professor of political science at Rutgers University. Their sensibility is sure to affect how businesses operate because, by 2020, millennials will make up nearly half the workforce.

“My generation has been imbued with a sense of responsibility,” said millennial Allison McGuire of the Companies for Good blog. “We grew up learning that our actions directly affect our communities.” As workers, millennials hope to nudge their employers to take responsibility for employees, for society and for the world, she said.

But millennials are not idealistic fools. According to a 2012 survey conducted by Zukin for Net Impact, an advocacy group, the recession of the late 2000s made the millennial generation care about survival in the labor market more than anything else, including their change-the-world aspirations. Job security and a good work/life balance surpass their altruistic desires.

Still, Zukin argues, that is “quite unusual for those in their early 20s, who are supposed to be so self-confident and entrepreneurial.” As the economy improves, he believes, the younger generation will re-focus on making a difference and seek jobs allowing them to do that.

**Photo Credit: Women’s Technology Empowerment Centre/[Flickr](#)**

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